

REMARKS

Applicants respectfully request reconsideration of this application in view of the foregoing amendment and following remarks.

Information Disclosure Statement

It is indicated in the Office Action that the cited foreign documents in an IDS filed March 11, 2002 are not submitted.

While Applicants believe that the cited references were submitted along with the March 11, 2002 IDS as indicated in the stamped and returned postcard (a copy of which is attached herein), Applicants submit herewith a "Resubmission of the References" along with the two cited references (i.e., JP 8-87685 and JP 10-254851) to expedite the prosecution process.

Status of the Claims

Claims 1-51 are pending in this application. Claims 31-51 are withdrawn from consideration. Among the remaining claims 1-30, claims 1, 15 and 29 are independent. Claims 1-30 stand rejected.

By this amendment, claims 7, 8, 21 and 22 are cancelled without prejudice or disclaimer. Claims 1-6, 9-20 and 23-30 are amended. No new matter has been added by this amendment.

Objections

Claims 1-7 and 15 have been objected to as including minor informalities.

Applicants believe that the objections raised by the Examiner have been addressed by the amendments to the relevant claims as shown above.

Applicants respectfully request that these objections be withdrawn.

Rejection under 35 U.S.C. §112

Claim 12 has been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §112, first paragraph, as allegedly failing to comply with the enablement requirement. The Examiner indicates that the subject matter of controlling an interuser distance based on a “designated interuser distance input” and “designated interuser distance” is not disclosed in the original specification.

Applicants note that one of the aspects of the present invention controls the interuser distance based on input information such as shown in, e.g., Fig. 14 and relevant portion of the specification. Fig. 14 discloses an organization chart for regulating interuser distances in the system. See, also, for example, the paragraph beginning at line 9, page 48 through line 8, page 49 of the original specification that shows how the interuser distance is determined based on the designated input information such as an organization distance.

Claims 1, 3, 5, 7, 9-12, 15, 19-21, 23 and 24 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph, as being indefinite.

As indicated above, each of the rejected claims has been amended and Applicants believe that the rejections directed to these claims have been addressed.

Reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of claims 1, 3, 5, 7, 9-12, 15, 19-21, 23 and 24 under 35 U.S.C. §112 is respectfully requested.

Rejection under 35 U.S.C. §103

Claims 1, 7, 13, 15, 18 and 29 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 6,567,844 to Fukasawa (“Fukasawa”) in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,738,807 to Matsui et al. (“Matsui”) in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,415,188 to Fernandez et al. (“Fernandez”).

As indicated above, independent claims 1, 15 and 29 have been amended for further clarification. In particular, the distributed system of amended claim 1 receives status information of a first user including a pictorial image of the first user and receives a request of a second user requesting the pictorial image. The virtual space system then determines an interuser distance between the first and second users based on a predetermined rule such as a distance within an organization. Based on the determined interuser distance, the virtual system processes the pictorial image. For example, a filtering process is performed for the image data of the pictorial image using a filtering level depending on the determined interuser distance. The virtual system then transmits the processed image data to the requestor (i.e., the second user) enabling the second user to view the processed image data using a display device. Other amended independent claims 15 and 29 recite similar features to claim 1 as amended. Support for the amendment may be found throughout the original specification, for example, at line 25, page 43 through line 24, page 52.

With the invention as featured in amended claims 1, 15 and 29, the symmetrical privacy protection may be maintained between the users in the distributed system where multiple users are logged in each conducting different tasks at different locations.

Fukasawa discloses an apparatus for realizing a coordinative work environment adaptable to various forms of the coordinative works (e.g., either in a positively supporting specified coordinative work or in a managing only type coordinative work). Fukasawa's apparatus utilizes a mechanism that describes the coordinative work form and effects the coordinative work management process adapted to arbitrary coordinative work form using the description.

Matsui is cited as disclosing a distributed system provided with a plurality of user terminal devices, display means and a server device connected with the user terminal devices. Fernandez is cited as disclosing a video conferencing system that captures an image of a user with a camera.

None of the cited references, however, shows or suggests the claimed invention as featured in amended claims 1, 15 and 29 (e.g., determining an interuser distance based on a predetermined rule and processing the pictorial image of the user based on the determined interuser distance).

Accordingly, each of claims 1, 15 and 29 as amended is believed neither anticipated by nor rendered obvious in view of the cited references (i.e., Fukasawa, Matsui and Fernandez), either taken alone or in combination, for at least the reasons as discussed above.

Reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejections of claims 1, 15 and 29 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) is respectfully requested.

Applicants have not individually addressed the rejections of the dependent claims because Applicants submit that the independent claims from which they respectively depend are in condition for allowance as set forth above. Applicants however reserve the right to address such rejections of the dependent claims should such be necessary.

Applicants believe that the application is in condition for allowance and such action is respectfully requested.

AUTHORIZATION

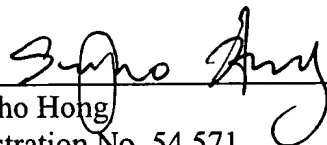
No petitions or additional fees are believed due for this amendment and/or any accompanying submissions. However, to the extent that any additional fees and/or petition is required, including a petition for extension of time, Applicants hereby petition the Commissioner to grant such petition, and hereby authorizes the Commissioner to charge any additional fees, including any fees which may be required for such petition, or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 13-4500 (Order No. 1232-4748). A DUPLICATE COPY OF THIS SHEET IS ENCLOSED.

An early and favorable examination on the merits is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,
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